

0:00:00 Speaker 1: In the first interview you kind of just summed up the whole pregnancy up until those late 30 weeks as like “pregnancy was fine,” “pregnancy was going on fine.” So okay. So then you're diagnosed with that pre-eclampsia. And I'm wondering if you can tell me a little bit about how that felt to get that diagnosis. I don't know how much you knew about pre-eclampsia at the time or how that changed your sense within your own pregnancy, you know?

0:00:29 Sarah H: Yeah, yeah. I wanna tell you something else really, really quickly beforehand. This is, I mean this is like that woman, this isn't traumatic or anything but...

0:00:37 S1: No that's fine.

0:00:38 Sarah H: Um, I, uh, when I, when I found out that I was pregnant I had gone to the public library Ann Arbor Public Library for a presentation by the midwives and Lisa was one of them.

0:00:54 S1: Oh wow.

0:00:53.5 Sarah H: So, so, by the midwives. It was just a public presentation on what the hell is midwifery? And how is it different? And so it was in one of their meeting rooms and I remember the public library had recently been updated. So it looked, I mean it's seedy now but then it was updated a bit and it was towards the end of the presentation and they were doing a slide view on a slide, a slideshow to end the whole thing. And I'm just, I'm at the back of the room and I'm watching this and just seeing all these wonderful pictures. And Lars and I had been trying to get pregnant for like two months and like we got married in July I think and this was maybe, oh this was September. No no, it was October. It was October. And so I'm watching this slide view and all of a sudden it's like electricity. It's like electric bolts shot out of both of my breasts right through my nipples. It was just like lightning bolts. And I'm like "What the hell?" Like, like, I'm just sitting there thinking is this just like wishful thinking? Like what the hell just happened? It's like had I been, had I had a superpower I would've blasted the whole screen [laughter], you know? And I'm thinking what is that?

0:02:21 Sarah H: What was that? And I went to therapy like the next day or something and she said "Well maybe you're pregnant." And I think Lars was at, he was at the annual like conference for his, for anthropologists and he came home and it was the first day that I could test with tests at that point and so I was like a day late but I felt like I was gonna get my period at any second. And I tested and it was very faint, but I was pregnant. So, and then it began to happen more and more so that was my biggest sign that I was pregnant is that I get lightning bolts in my breasts.

0:02:54 S1: You're amazing [laughter]

0:02:57 Sarah H: And the same thing happened with Emma. I remembered, I will know I'm pregnant if I start getting lightning bolts and it was incredible.

0:03:06 S1: That is incredible Sarah.

0:03:06 Sarah H: Yeah.

0:03:07 S1: So let me ask you. Do you think it was just coincidence or do you think... You know how sometimes to pump when you're breastfeeding you have to look at pictures of your baby and it kind of like stimulates you?

0:03:15 Sarah H: Yeah.

0:03:17 S1: Do you think something in that slideshow is sort of stimulating in that same way?

0:03:22.6 Sarah H: I think it had to be. I mean I'm thinking inside it had to be I think I was set up to start having these electrical zaps in my breasts anyway 'cause hormonally it was doing something in my breasts. But, it was looking at, I think it was visually looking at the slides 'cause women were breastfeeding after birth and I think it was enough extra stimulation that also fed into the whatever hormonal process. I think it was absolutely part of it.

0:03:51 S1: Oh my Gosh. I will forever think of you as the, what is it? The impregnating superhero? What is, what would it be? It's not a superhero for getting pregnant just for alerting you. [laughter]

0:04:02 Sarah H: For alerting you. It's your breast alarm. It was so amazing. It was, it was really like lightning.

0:04:10 S1: Oh my gosh. That's amazing.

0:04:11 S1: Yeah, yeah, that was amazing. So, because I hadn't really experienced anything, like I had some morning sickness with Jacob for the first three months. Um, a couple times I had to go home from work, like, I remember I would - there was one woman at work who would eat she'd eat Taco Bell. She'd bring Taco Bell burritos home and then heat them up. And there's something about that smell. I could be absolutely fine and the next thing I know I'd be lying on the floor of my office just, oh my God. It was horrible, you know? And a couple times I had to go home it was so bad. But that was like the worst of the pregnancy. So I just sort of, it seemed - I loved being pregnant. I adored being pregnant. So, when I found out that I had preeclampsia, first of all it put a reason to why I felt like I was so puffy. Like, my, my nose was, I felt I had a Bozo the clown nose and it was, I had a puffy nose. My face was puffy, my feet were beginning to get puffy. I felt like a big wallowing, I felt like I should just walk around in a mumu, I felt I was a little bit like Veruca Salt in um, you know Willy Wonka, just puffy puffy. So it put a reason to it. And I had been aware of the possibility 'cause I read every single damn pregnancy book you could read and kept track of every step along the way. Of course when I was pregnant with Emma - never opened a book.

0:05:47 S1: Of course.

0:05:47 Sarah H: I never even thought about it. I would forget I was pregnant because I was being a mom to a one-year-old. It was just a - one and a half year old. I was just, I didn't even think about it. Where? What month am I? So, it was a little bit of a, a little bit of a check to me. Like, you know, this has been going along perfectly, everything's great. Now we're gonna throw a little glitch. Um, but I felt like they really knew what they were doing and I didn't feel, I didn't feel afraid at all. Had I known how bad being induced was I would've felt afraid. I don't think I would've been as blasé about it.

0:06:33 S1: So wary about the induction but not the risk of preeclampsia. Preeclamptic state is, you know, it's risky. It can be.

0:06:38 Sarah H: Yeah, it can be risky but it never got to, it never got to the part that they were very worried. It got to the point where after a week they said yeah let's induce because it was still

progressing. But it never got, I never had headaches. It never got to the dangerous level. So, I think I would've panicked a bit more had it gotten dangerous. They just got to the point where yeah, you know, he can come out now, he's only gonna be two weeks early and let's get this over because it's not gonna end until he is delivered.

0:07:08 S1: Right right right.

0:07:10 Sarah H: And we don't want you to get worse so, And I was ready not to be pregnant anymore.

0:07:15 S1: Let's be...

0:07:17 Sarah H: Although I had this, I had this weird feeling, and I had it with Emma too. I was glad that she decided when she was coming but I did have this weird feeling like, well it's not when he is supposed to be born. He should be born when he's supposed to be born. So, I was a little regretful about that. [S1 affirmative]. Yeah.

0:07:36 S1: So I just wanna circle back for a moment to something you said earlier that you and Lars were trying to get pregnant. So you mentioned in your first interview you got pregnant pretty soon into the marriage. But that was intentional.

0:07:47 Sarah H: Yeah.

0:07:47 S1: Okay. Just wanted for, for

0:07:49 Sarah H: Yeah. Yeah. We got married in July and we traveled the month of September and part of October, and we started trying during that time. So, I think it was only two months that we tried.

0:08:08 S1: Wow. Wow. Pretty soon.

0:08:10 Sarah H: Yep.

0:08:11 S1: So, you read every book on the planet but prior to that, how, what did you know about birth? Did you know a lot? Did you grow up in a family where it was discussed or was reading your first exposure to what it might look like, what it would involve?

0:08:27 Sarah H: I think it was reading. Um, I do remember parts of my mom being pregnant with my little sister. And I remember her, 'cause I would've been four while she was pregnant, and I remember sitting in bed with her with this round belly. But I also remember that it didn't really make sense to me. She was telling me that there was a baby inside of there and I, we knew it was a girl, and I named her Amy, so I named her and I knew intellectually everything she was saying but I didn't really get it.

0:09:01 S1: Of course.

0:09:02 Sarah H: Yeah. Ao then she disappears and I spend the night at someone's house, oh wait for a couple times, so then she was in the hospital with my sister and I remember standing, my dad took me outside the hospital and I was yelling up to her to the window and my mom was in bed bereft, missing me so horribly thinking she was hallucinating, me calling after her. So, she didn't

even come to look out the window [laughter]. And so, like she's weeping hearing my voice and I'm really down there calling to her, you know... [laughter]

0:09:36 S1: That's got to be a metaphor for something.

0:09:37 Sarah H: Oh, for something. I remember coming in, you know coming home. She's home and I remember running in the back door and I burst into tears, you know ran into my mom's arms. I burst into tears. She burst into tears. We're hugging each other. It's been such a separation it's been how many days it was and then oh by the way here is your sister. [laughter] And that's when I understood what happened. But the best thing about it is that I got a green and white striped plastic jump rope, silly putty, and a super ball. Those were the three gifts I got from my sister [laughter].

0:10:12 S1: Who you named. Wow. You guys had a relationship right out of the gate.

0:10:15 Sarah H: Yeah. She hated her name. She changed it legally when she was seven. [laughter]

0:10:21 S1: What did she change it to? Just out of curiosity.

0:10:24 Sarah H: Amelia.

0:10:24 S1: Oh wow. Fancier.

0:10:25 Sarah H: Yeah. Yeah. So she went from Amy to Amelia.

0:10:28 S1: Oh wow. Interesting.

0:10:31 Sarah H: Yeah.

0:10:31 S1: How nice of your parents to let her change it.

0:10:32 Sarah H: Yeah.

0:10:35 S1: So then as you got older did your mom talk about pregnancy with you? Birth with you? Your aunts your grandparents? Some families it's a thing people talk about because someone's always pregnant.

0:10:48 Sarah H: Yeah. Well in my family, the one thing you should know about my family is that both of my parents, well my mom's dead now, but they're artists, they were artists and they taught at Wayne State, and both - so I grew up in a very sexually stimulating environment with very inappropriate artwork around me. I mean, extremely inappropriate artwork and very prudish parents. I mean, my dad was a complete prude.

0:11:16 S1: Interesting.

0:11:17 Sarah H: But his work is filled with perversity, sexual perversity, violence, just really horrific stuff.

0:11:25 S1: Wow.

0:11:26 Sarah H: And my mom's is more just, in your face sexuality. So, over our dining room

table, the two biggest paintings I can remember being there at various points were two women lying together in bed. A really large painting very well done. Beautiful. But it's two women lounging together. And the other one was of, was of my sister when she was about six in the bathtub. And this is a large painting right over our dining room table. My sister in the bathtub, so you're looking down on her in the bathtub, her legs, you know, you can see everything, her legs are apart. And I would say "Why do you have to put Amy on the wall?" like, "That's not your sister. It's just the idea of her." No, it's my sister.

0:12:06 S1: Right.

0:12:09.7 Sarah H: Naked sister over - so it was a very, very inappropriate household. So, anything that had to do with the body I tried not to talk about with them. So, for example, I had 'member, I remember I had horrible cramps when I was 13, menstrual cramps, and my mom's response to me was, "well why don't you just go and masturbate that usually helps" said it just matter of fact like that. We had never discussed masturbation.

0:12:34 S1: Wow.

0:12:35 Sarah H: And I immediately just [sound] you know, closed up like [sound]. But, but I grew, so what, I had this façade in our family that nothing affected me. Nothing. Just as, I'd have this bland expression like nothing bothers me, nothing throws me for a loop. So, I did not, we did not talk about pregnancy, we didn't talk about childbirth. My mom would bring things up that were probably too much that I wanted to know, [S1 affirmative] but I just avoided anything like that.

0:13:11 S1: [S1 affirmative] How interesting that all of this sort of, availability of the subject matter was not um, accompanied, I mean, inappropriate as it would have been, was not accompanied with an openness about making you feel comfortable with it you know?

0:13:29 Sarah H: Yeah.

0:13:30 S1: Wow.

0:13:31 Sarah H: No, no. I mean, my mom, my mom focused on women and children in her artwork. Naked women and children. So, there was a lot of pregnant naked women, pregnant naked women, round bellies, infants, little kids.

0:13:46 S1: Wow.

0:13:47 Sarah H: But very detailed, very um, very odd. And my dad took naked photos of my sister and I, um for studies for his artwork.

0:14:01 S1: Wow, Sarah that must have been...

0:14:02 Sarah H: I know.

0:14:02 S1: very challenging to grow up within.

0:14:04 Sarah H: It, it, it has, um - I can tell you it has fucked up my sexuality like you would not believe.

0:14:11 S1: I do believe it [SH laughter]. I mean I don't know the ways but I believe that it did.

0:14:15 Sarah H: Yeah. Yeah. I...

0:14:16 S1: I don't see how it couldn't honestly.

0:14:18 Sarah H: Yeah. Yeah. It's um, I, I did a lot, I've had a lot of therapy. But um, the very first time I went to therapy I, I, it was at the psych clinic here at U of M and when I was an intern there 'cause that's where I did my clinical experience for my master's work. Uh, I went, I was in the file cabinets 'cause we were doing, I had to do this project. So, lo and behold there's my file from like, when I was 20. So, I picked it out and read it and it was a senior clinician I remember it was a three-day evaluation. It was really intense. And I remember at the end of it he, he said "it remains unclear how this patient has, is just very healthy and just simply slightly neurotic given her family history." [laughter] It's like it remains unclear how she's so healthy, you know?

0:15:15 S1: That's sort of like a, backhanded compliment there in there somewhere. [laughter]

0:15:20 Sarah H: Yeah. But I really am, I really am like the least screwed up of all my fam-, I'm just the strongest one of my family. And ultimately it didn't, um, it didn't – it just kind of - I think I would've had a more healthy life sex-, sexually if it just weren't such a weird area for me.

0:15:40 S1: Of course.

0:15:41 Sarah H: Yeah.

0:15:42 S1: Yeah. And so I was not thinking this way when I listened to the previous interview but that's so interesting to me because then you enter into this birthing experience where I am sure that, I mean, I'm gonna presume that you had no time or emotional space to think about like, how you looked, you know what I mean? Like, the vulnerability of your body. I mean, I'm sure you were naked by the time - all that pain and everything - most women, or birthing people, eliminate all sensory things that are unnecessary. And I'm impressed that you came through such a dramatic birth, a challenging birth, with so much vulnerability in play, with a background like this, and still look back on it in such a generous way.

0:16:30 Sarah H: I think, partly it's because, when I say that I always wanted children I always wanted children [laughter]. And being pregnant I absolutely loved. So I think it gave me time to own it as my own. And my mother wasn't around me. For both pregnancies she was living elsewhere. I think had she been around me I would've had a much more difficult time. Because she's so, she was so intrusive. But I never saw her before - I never saw her from when I was pregnant 'til the first couple of days after the babies were born so I didn't have to deal with that. When Emma was born, uh, I picked my mom up at the airport the second day, you know, so there I've got Emma, I'm bopping around I'm feeling great.

0:17:18 S1: Why were you the airport taxi? [laughter]

0:17:23 Sarah H: I was great. I was like great. And I bring her home. We're sitting down on the couch 'cause I'm nursing again – okay, this is, my old therapist, when this would come up she'd say "I just think back to that eww situation," okay - so my mother leans toward me and she's going through some tri- dilemma or - 'cause she's always going through something in her life - she leans toward me and she goes "Can I have some?" as I'm breastfeeding, "Can I have some?"

0:17:48 S1: Sarah?

0:17:50 Sarah H: And I looked at her I said "Okay, just stop. Just stop okay. And no more, no more inappropriate remarks. I swear to God mom." You know?

0:18:01 S1: Wow. Sarah...

0:18:02 Sarah H: "Let me have some?" Like, what the fuck mom [laughter].

0:18:05 S1: Di-, I, wow. Wow, I am somewhat speechless. Because it's hard to know, where is that, where is that coming from? Is it just meant to be disruptive? Is it meant to be suggestive? You know what I mean? I mean, where is it coming from?

0:18:24 Sarah H: Yeah, I don't know.

0:18:24 S1: What is its purpose? What is the purpose?

0:18:26 Sarah H: Is it just pure need?

0:18:28 S1: Right.

0:18:29 Sarah H: I ended up being my mother's mother for most of, you know after my parents divorced, I ended up like taking care of her. But it's just so eww to your own daughter. You know?

0:18:40 S1: Yeah. While she's in an, you know, inarguably intimate [yeah] moment with another human [right]. Fully within appropriate bounds [right]. But still intimacy is actively occurring.

0:18:55 Sarah H: Right. My mother was not...

0:18:56 S1: It's not theoretical.

0:18:57 Sarah H: a mother to me. Yeah. She wasn't a mother to me, like nurturing me when I've just given birth [right]. No, she comes to visit, actually, she'd lost her job and everything and she's living with us at that point for a couple months. And I just have had a baby and I'm mothering her from that point on [yeah]. Even though I've just had a baby. I have an almost 2-year-old, a brand new baby. I'm mak- I'm making the dinners, I'm taking care of everyone, you know, and like, and my mother too. So, yeah.

0:19:26 S1: But also, that time is so um, body centric. So sexuality centric, you know, partners are trying to kind of reestablish some sort of connection typically between each other [yeah]. Women, or birthing people, but especially women who are breastfeeding are figuring out where does my body stop and that body begin, or where does my purpose stop and just my own sense of self begin [yeah, yeah]. I mean it's such a confusing bodily embodied time [yeah]. And then to have someone who has mishandled...

0:20:04.3 Sarah H: Complicates it further by asking to be included in it, you know?

0:20:08.4 S1: But also just having her there must have complicated your experience of reorienting to your own new body and new physical role.

0:20:12 Sarah H: Yeah.

0:20:13 S1: I have to imagine.

0:20:14 Sarah H: Yeah.

0:20:15 S1: Yeah.

0:20:16 Sarah H: It was, it was - thinking back on it, it went pretty well.

0:20:23 S1: All things considered.

0:20:25 Sarah H: All things considered but, considered, but um, I was definitely just a mother for a long time. And even though I felt autonomous, I don't know how I did, but I did, I was happy as a clam with those two kids. But it was, it was just me, 'cause Lars would go teach, I was at home all day with those two kids. And I think had it gone on the whole thing, past a couple years I would've gone bonkers. But for those couple of years I was in my element but it involved setting boundaries on my mother. And Lars I think was just trying to keep his head afloat.

0:21:15 S1: Yeah. It must have been complicating for him too.

0:21:18 Sarah H: Yeah.

0:21:18 S1: But I think there is something very, um, or there can be something very straightforward about those first days with a baby that is not, boundaries exist, you don't have to establish them between you and the baby. They exist and you almost don't even, I think many women don't even need a boundary between those two beings. But a boundary around the two of you is very helpful. And I don't think those boundaries are challenged in the same way. People give new parents and their babies more space than they give individuals. I think.

0:21:57.0 Sarah H: You're - I think you're right. I think there was a real clear, there was such a difference between my first birth and my second birth. The first thing, the first time, all of this was much more an issue. The second time I really kind of felt like there was not much change in my life [S1 affirmative]. The only change was now I had this second individual.

0:22:20.3 S1: Okay.

[laughter]

0:22:21.0 Sarah H: Honest to God. Yeah. Honest to God, it's like, I had Emma, I was home the next day cleaning the house because we had people coming over the next day. I hadn't even had time to , I hadn't had time to cancel. I hadn't thought about it. So I thought, oh, what the hell, we'll have them over, but we're order pizza 'cause I won't cook. So they come to the door and they're like, I'm holding the baby. What the hell? Like, it just had... you know ...so life continued exactly as it had. I was physically so fantastic that second birth. I just felt amazing.

0:22:54.5 S1: Wow.

0:22:55.4 Sarah H: Like I was just, honest to God, it's just like she was suddenly there. Now I had two and life just kept going the same. It was the oddest thing. Um, whereas the first time, it was... it

was I'd say four months before I began to feel like I knew, I was even thinking again.

0:23:19.0 S1: Sure, sure.

0:23:19.9 Sarah H: Yeah. It was so different. It was so different. And I'd only not been nursing for about four months. [S1 affirmative] 'Cause at one point I, and being pregnant and still nursing Jacob, I began to feel like I just wanted to pick him up, throw him against the wall. [chuckle]

0:23:37.6 S1: You're like, oh. So [laughter]

0:23:40.2 Sarah H: I had to like, it was irritating to me. So I had to wean him. So it was just a short time period. But um, and I remember he wanted to try nursing 'cause 'cause it'd only been, been a couple months.

0:23:52.5 S1: Sure. Yeah.

0:23:52.5 Sarah H: And so he asked, I said, sure. And so he tries and he looks at me like...

0:23:57.1 S1: I used to do this?

0:23:58.3 Sarah H: Yeah. Just at that little bit of time period. It's like urgh.

[S1 laughter]

0:24:02.7 Sarah H: That was funny.

0:24:03.9 S1: So your mom then stayed with you during those early, that early postpartum period.

0:24:07.4 Sarah H: A couple, yeah, a couple weeks until we found her a nice thing house sitting for the summer for friends. So she was out of the house at that point.

0:24:14.4 S1: But still in town.

0:24:15.9 Sarah H: But still in town. Um, ah, and then she would, she house sit a couple more times for them. But as in she was an older, she was, my parents were divorced and my dad kept going uphill, my mother financially kept going downhill. So for a time period she was doing things like being sorority mothers for colleges and universities. So she would...

0:24:38.4 S1: I didn't know that was a thing.

0:24:39.4 Sarah H: It is. I didn't know it was a thing either. And they're usually women in their 50s and older who have been divorced. And so you get free room and board and you get some salary and you just live there in a suite. And you kind of monitor these stupid stupid sorority girls.

[laughter]

0:24:58.3 Sarah H: You know? You have to like order the food and that kind of stuff. But she must have done that, I don't know, it's six or seven different places all over. She did it in California, she did it in Salt Lake City. She did it in Rhode Island, like all over the place. Lansing, here, U of M. Yeah.

0:25:14.2 S1: Wow. Okay. So you went into the birth with your knowledge gained from reading more than [talking] sort of talking inherited, family.

0:25:25.4 Sarah H: Yeah. I didn't really have any personal inherited info and I also didn't take any classes. So, and I didn't talk to many other people about being pregnant. So it was pretty much book learning and watching like stuff on TV, those stupid having a baby type series, which, which never really say anything negative. They just kind of.

0:25:47.9 S1: Right, right.

0:25:49.6 Sarah H: Yeah.

0:25:51.7 S1: So why do you think you do you think you didn't talk to other people or take a class? I mean, you seem someone who loves, who likes to get the information needed.

0:26:00.2 Sarah H: Yeah. I didn't wanna talk about it with people. I think that was too close to um, talking about... talking about my body in that way I think was too scary for me. And I actually didn't even wanna know. Part of me just didn't wanna know. [S1 affirmative] Which I think why it was such a shock, the actual experience, why it was such a shock to me.

0:26:25.2 S1: 'Cause I almost feel like the ways you did get that information are ways that separate it from *your* body right? Like you're saying. Like it's about *a* body... But not even not just your body but not even a particular body. Like if you talked to a friend who had just given birth it would be their body... But it makes it a very like universal body.

0:26:44.0 Sarah H: Yeah. It's just a generic book illustration list of things that can happen.

0:26:50.5 S1: Yeah. Interesting.

0:26:51.9 Sarah H: And you know, in books they don't even talk about - this is what got me 'cause after my first child, I, not only did they not come check on me for fundal checks and all that, make sure that I was contracting and everything was fine - they didn't give me any ice packs so there was no normally you do the check and then you give a new ice pack that they can if they've had any sort of tear or anything didn't get any of that. So I was so uncomfortable sitting down and so swollen. Um and so what do I do when I get home? I go to my book and it just talks about peroneal discomfort. Peroneal discomfort. Nothing really talks about, "what the hell?"

0:27:35.6 S1: Yeah.

0:27:36.1 Sarah H: What's normal, what's not normal. What can you do? What I mean they don't address it. Peroneal discomfort. Now I think they do a little bit more but I couldn't find that information and I didn't ask anyone. I didn't call my midwife. I didn't say anything.

0:27:49.2 S1: So at the time did you think that them not checking on you was odd? Or did you just assumed that's how it went?

0:27:55.1 Sarah H: I just assumed that's how it went. I didn't know they're supposed to check on me until I went to nursing school. And then I understood the importance of those checks. Um, and it's for the life of the mother you know? And then I realized, because really I was put in a room and nothing until the next afternoon when I left ,when a midwife came to check me and I mentioned she

talked about the previous checks I said “what checks?” I...

0:28:26.5 S1: Wow.

0:28:27.4 Sarah H: Yeah. It's just I was completely forgotten down there.

0:28:30.2 S1: And how did that feel to you? I mean you're a brand new, brand new parent with a brand new very fragile being.

0:28:35.8 Sarah H: I think I took it as there's something deficient about me. Something odd something, um, not deserving of the attention.

0:28:46.0 S1: Yeah.

0:28:47.1 Sarah H: Yeah.

0:28:48.7 S1: And did that change as you went home? I mean it sounds like you didn't have, it sounds like Lars wasn't dotting on you and caring for I mean it sounds like you were taking care of everyone when you went home.

0:29:00.8 Sarah H: Um, with Jacob the first one. No, he was pretty helpful actually 'cause I really was a wreck. I mean he had to, he would have to haul me to sitting position and we didn't have a bed we just had a mattress on the floor. Getting outta bed was kind of...

0:29:17.9 S1: Oh my God. Yeah. That would be really hard.

0:29:17.9 Sarah H: Hard for a while.

0:29:20.7 S1: I would've just like rolled off the edge and crawled somewhere.

[laughter]

0:29:25.2 Sarah H: Yeah. Hands and knees and get up. [laughter] Um, he was actually pretty helpful with all that and supportive. But neither of us knew what, what, what the hell was going on. And I didn't know what was normal or not normal and, was it normal to feel like well I'm gonna go for a walk but then realize like halfway, half a block that I have no back muscles or stomach? I be like, [groan] you know I'd be, this baby in a stroller ,and I'm like okay that's enough. And I'd go home just exhausted with the first one. The second one, on the second day we were at the park, the third day we were at the pool.

0:30:06.4 S1: Of course you were. Why wouldn't you be?

0:30:07.8 Sarah H: It was like night and day.

0:30:08.7 S1: Wow. Wow.

0:30:09.4 Sarah H: So yeah I didn't ask questions the first time. I just, I didn't know if I, if after birth whether I was normal or not normal... What was normal ,what was not normal, but I was not gonna ask... Yeah.

0:30:25.8 S1: Okay. So you had that long period of time after they began your induction. Right?

first thing in the morning. So you say there was nothing happening. So I just wanna clarify, no contractions at all?

0:30:37.1 Sarah H: Yeah. I had Braxton Hicks. But I had no contractions that involved pain.

0:30:43.7 S1: Okay.

0:30:44.9 Sarah H: So it was just the...

0:30:47.7 S1: The tensing.

0:30:51.4 Sarah H: Yeah. And they were, some were pretty intense but I didn't know that that wasn't a contraction 'cause I hadn't had one yet. I mean they were contractions, but they weren't at the cervix. There was absolutely no pain.

0:31:00.8 S1: Right right. Yeah. And no dilation then.

0:31:05.2 Sarah H: Yeah, no dilation. Right. So...

0:31:05.9 S1: 'Cause they must have checked you before the induction.

0:31:09.0 Sarah H: They checked me before the induction and with the prostaglandin gel I had with which I had done the prior week, I think twice. I think I went from one to three centimeters.

0:31:19.5 S1: That's pretty typical to be at three.

0:31:21.1 Sarah H: Right, right. So when I came in I was at a three. [right] And then they checked me when they decided they weren't gonna do it anymore 'cause I was still like at a three. So and nothing had been going on. And really I wasn't at all in any discomfort. Um, and it was only when all of a sudden my waters broke. That suddenly with the you know, the head of the baby there everything went to town.

0:31:46.1 S1: So were you in that 12 hours without progression how did that, how did you experience that? Many birthing people interpret that as a form of failure of not progressing?

0:31:56.9 Sarah H: I didn't know that I wasn't progressing... I mean when I was having all those Braxton Hicks I thought oh it's doing something [laughter]. And I didn't know there was a possibility that they would send me home. So I thought I was in this, in a process and it was just gonna keep going. And I would hear about these long labors and no one had come in and said we've been doing this for a while. I mean it's only when they came in at the very end it's like you know what? You haven't dilated we're gonna send you home. So I was, I was just in a holding pattern thinking, thinking that I was laboring, [laughter] thinking that this was okay.

0:32:35.7 S1: It's the early part of labor.

0:32:37.4 Sarah H: Yeah. Not too bad. Yeah.

0:32:40.6 S1: Interesting. Okay. So understandably, you mentioned a sense of panic when you make that decision which I mean who wouldn't.

[laughter]

0:32:48.9 Sarah H: I mean utter, utter like, mind blowing - it was pure terror I went from, yeah.

0:33:00.1 S1: Yeah. So I'm wondering if you can tell me a little more about that panic, and maybe you just have in terms of like, was it like physiologic, you know like, we all have had that feeling in our body of our body panicking, or was it like a fear, like, I can't possibly do this? But I got the sense from your story that you were beyond sort of understanding, conceptualizing what was happening and you were just doing the thing that was happening.

[laughter]

0:33:21.5 Sarah H: Well, at the very first panic was physiological and emotional and intellectual, because I went from no discomfort all day to you know, within a couple minutes of my waters breaking the pain was so, um, it was so severe. And then to, and to think, I was thinking, so now this is labor? Well, no, it wasn't labor. It was that train wreck labor. It was the barreling into unbelievable labor. Really fast precipitous. It's not normal labor, but I was thinking, "okay, so this is labor? There's no fucking way I'm gonna be able to do this." And that with the horrible nausea that hit me. Um, so the panic and the terror was like, I can't, like immediately I can't do this, this is, oh my God. And I remember just looking at Lars just like, I want like, stop. Let's stop.

[laughter]

0:34:29.2 Sarah H: And I couldn't talk to anyone other than him because they're all bustling around doing what they need to do. They're getting the wet sheets out from underneath me. I don't know what the hell they were doing 'cause I was lying on my left side looking at him. And so it was pure panic and then it just kept on.

0:34:47.8 Sarah H: So, as it kept on, that's when I stopped thinking intellectually at all. It was just sort of a enduring, it was a, there's nothing I could do, but get through it. So, it was panic, but with no intellect. I lost time of day. I remember looking at one, 'cause I had my eyes shut, I remember looking outside at one point and I said, it's still light out. It probably been a half hour, of course it was still light out.

[laughter]

0:35:17.3 Sarah H: It was like seven o'clock at night and the sun hadn't gone down, but it felt like it had been years. [S1 affirmative]

0:35:24.7 S1: So in the midst of that, you eventually get this gas, which unfortunately doesn't do much for you, but was there any other discussion about pain meds? Was there a discussion that you just decided "no." Or was it just not, it wasn't, it wasn't on offer?

0:35:41.2 Sarah H: It wasn't an offer. It was not an offer. I think it wasn't offered because they could see how fast I was going. Or or or, her, no one checked me again until I grunted and had to push. But that was you know relatively a short time period, maybe a half hour. But I think, because watching the contraction – contraptions, [laughter] contractions, shutting off the Pitocin very quickly because I was just a contraction, contraction and watching what was going on, I think she knew from her experience that this is gonna be pretty quick. It's gonna be horrible, but it's gonna be pretty quick. So, she didn't offer anything. I didn't ask for anything 'cause I was just trying to, I

mean it didn't occur to me to even ask for pain relief. I was just trying to survive. And um, so at some point she just came with a gas, which that, we had talked before, they knew that I was interested in having it, that it was supposed to be helpful. Um, so no, there was no real talk about it. [S1 affirmative] But it was like 30 minutes or 45 minutes of that.

0:36:51.4 S1: Well, and at that time they've, they've sort of adjusted a little on this now, I think. But at that time, I think too, they were very strict on this idea that you would pass the point of epidurals?

0:37:02.1 Sarah H: Right.

0:37:03.0 S1: Which I mean, is arguable what they meant by that. At some point, yes, it's not going to, you're gonna be delivered before it's effectual, but that window's much, like that time, you can take it much later into labor than people thought for a long time. Or than providers wanted people to.

0:37:17.7 Sarah H: Yeah with Emma...

0:37:18.6 S1: That probably was true at that time too.

0:37:20.9 Sarah H: With Emma. They, I told you how fast that went. But they got someone down to put an epidural in. They couldn't get her permission. So I had, I gave my verbal permission and I'm glad that they did that because it was so late in the process that I had one more contraction and she was born. I mean, that's how late it was in the process. But the guy was exceptional. And I remember he said to me, he, because I said just, I don't, you know,

[laughter]

0:37:50.6 Sarah H: I'm just glad you got here and did it. Thank you so much for doing it. Even if it was just one more contraction he said he said, because yeah, at some point it becomes you're just like a wounded animal, you know, you need some relief and like yeah. I needed, I had to have it.

0:38:04.7 S1: Yeah.

0:38:06.1 Sarah H: And then because I tore with her, because the, I had epi, not an epi, no, I did an episiotomy with her because there was no time, the tear that healed with Jacob couldn't stretch.

0:38:17.4 S1: Right.

0:38:17.4 Sarah H: Because she just blasted. So they had to do an episiotomy. So thank God I had the epidural because it was just like...

0:38:25.3 S1: Yeah. And I think for some, in some birth experiences too, even if it doesn't actually become medically effective, it does give the birthing person this assurance that something's, help is coming.

0:38:39.4 Sarah H: Yeah.

0:38:39.5 S1: And so they find like some more inner strength in the meantime.

0:38:42.3 Sarah H: Yeah.

0:38:42.4 S1: Even if they don't ever need the help that arrives.

0:38:44.5 Sarah H: Yeah.

0:38:44.7 S1: And the baby's already out or whatever.

0:38:46.4 Sarah H: Yeah.

0:38:47.1 S1: I do think that's true. Okay. So, Jacob comes quickly and I'm curious who caught him?

0:38:56.7 Sarah H: Uh, midwife.

0:38:58.0 S1: The midwife caught him.

0:39:00.0 Sarah H: Midwife caught him and or eased him out with his head, with his hand and his head up to, right up to my belly, just right up to my chest right away, [S1 affirmative] where they towed him down and looked at him and everything. And then Lars cut the cord, and then he carried him over to the warmer where they did the check and all that. And then I think he was the one... then they gave him back to Lars and then Lars gave him back to me.

0:39:41.1 S1: I'm always, I'm always curious who catches the baby, because the lots of people have like a really specific plan for it, and then the labor unfolds and they're just like, by the time the baby's coming out, they're like, just someone grab the baby. Okay. Like, it doesn't matter anymore.

0:39:53.8 Sarah H: I don't think we, I don't think we ever discussed anyone else other than the midwife catching the baby.

0:39:58.6 S1: Probably at that time - it's become, I think a way that partners participate in the birth, but I think that's...

0:40:03.8 Sarah H: Oh, that's so nice.

0:40:04.8 S1: That's happened over time that like as a doula, I often ask people about it, and that's something that the couple has decided on to, as like, this is a way partner can be really part of the birth and step in and catch baby. And most mid-, almost all midwives and a lot of OBs are also fine with that as long as everything's happening safely you know.

0:40:25.1 Sarah H: Do the partners wear gloves or no gloves?

0:40:27.5 S1: They wear gloves.

0:40:30.1 Sarah H: I wouldn't. [laughter]

0:40:31.6 S1: Well, we heard how you don't [laughter], you just go in there and touch babies. [laughter] just go right in [laughter] That's fine. That's fine.

0:40:40.4 Sarah H: Yeah.

0:40:42.1 S1: Okay so I'm, I'm curious, as we've said several times at this point, like this is quite a birth, and I'm wondering as you've mentioned a couple times in the story that you assume some of this was normal, you didn't know it wasn't at certain points, and you know now, and probably shortly after [laughter] delivery when you started talking about it or checking your books, that some of these things were not normal. But I'm wondering then how it changed, looking forward to having more kids or did it, you know?

0:41:23.0 Sarah H: Um...it's funny that you say that I do know what's normal or not normal because I still think I have avoided thinking about it [hmm] in that way. I...

0:41:35.2 S1: Well, I shouldn't have used the word normal. Typical.

0:41:38.3 Sarah H: Yeah. Typical. Well, you know, my first dissertation topic was subjective, traumatic childbirth. Looking at it and trying to understand what was subjectively traumatic to people and what wasn't and why people talked about birth stories all the time. And was that because it was traumatic or because, you know, do all women do this? Um, but I couldn't go anywhere with that because the people I was paired with at the School of Nursing, it just didn't happen that way. So...

0:42:20.9 S1: No, that's too bad. Sarah. That sounds like very interesting research.

0:42:23.3 Sarah H: It was very interesting to me too. Obviously, personally motivated. It's funny, but I don't feel like it, I think I probably boxed the experience away. I remembered it very well. And I remembered how horrible the pain was, but it didn't stop me from getting pregnant with Emma. Um, I mean, it didn't stop me from wanting another baby. And going through the whole thing.

0:42:47.8 S1: Do you think it added any anxiety facing another birth, another labor? I mean, it's hard to know because you don't have a comparative experience, you didn't have a child before Jacob to go into another labor without.

0:43:05.5 Sarah H: I, I had a, I had found a really good midwife that I clicked with in Salt Lake City and she knew my previous experience, I talked about it with her, and how traumatic it was for me and what went wrong. And so we'd come up with a plan to anticipate if it was precipitous again. And um, and she actually, we talked about that childbirth experience, um and she actually helped me at that point know what could have been done better. What, what probably happened, all these, she helped me process it then. And, um, and so I really have to feel, like I found another woman I could really, really trust, um and felt safe with. And, what was alarming is that only a week before Emma was born, she changed hospitals. So, where I would've had to deliver with our insurance company was like seven miles down State Street in Salt Lake City. And she changed, thank God, her privileges to a different hospital, which was three blocks away.

0:44:16.7 S1: Well, as it turns out, very lucky for you. [laughter]

0:44:20.4 Sarah H: It was a shitty hospital, but it was three blocks away. 'Cause I wouldn't have made it seven blocks. I wouldn't have, I would've birthed her in the car alone.

0:44:30.9 S1: Wow.

0:44:31.5 Sarah H: And that would've been even more traumatic.

0:44:33.2 S1: Yeah. Yeah.

0:44:34.1 Sarah H: So, um, I, I just think she helped me process it. And we talked about planning for what could happen and when, what to call her about. I knew I could call her anytime for anything. Um, and I began calling her... ear- I began calling, well, the night before Emma was born, we were at a Blockbuster Video [video rental chain] and Jacob was riding on my belly. So I've got this 23 month old, and I suddenly had this overwhelming sense of, I need to go home. Like, it was just like, I've got to get home. It was, and I walked over to Lars and I said, we have got to go home right now. I just need to be home. So we did.

0:45:24.2 Sarah H: And I noticed in giving Jacob his bath that night that I was having a lot more Braxton Hicks they were just coming and coming. I went to bed as normal and woke up at two in the morning with more Braxton Hicks and I was like wide awake. So I watched TV for a bit and went back to bed. So, so I had called her the night before to tell her. And so she told me at that point, okay, things could be happening now you had that feeling, you need to get home, so call me at any time. I just felt like I could call her at any moment and we'd work it through together. So I felt very safe with her. So, I think had I not had that, I may have been more apprehensive [S1 affirmative] . Um, if I hadn't felt so supported and knew that she was just gonna drop whatever she was doing and come over to the hospital. As it was, 'cause Emma went even faster than Jacob, I, and we were only three blocks away, it took her like 30 minutes to get to the hospital, me just a few minutes and she couldn't, she was outside the hospital, her tag wasn't, couldn't swipe her in.

0:46:29.6 S1: Oh

0:46:30.2 Sarah H: So from the outside of that wing, she could hear me in there screaming, but she couldn't get in the door.

0:46:35.4 S1: Oh my God.

[laughter]

0:46:37.2 Sarah H: That's why they couldn't get the okay from her to do that epidural eventually she got in. Yeah.

0:46:44.1 S1: Oh my gosh. Can you imagine? What a moment for those things to fail us, right?

0:46:49.0 Sarah H: Yeah. Pretty funny.

0:46:50.7 S1: But I'm interested, Sarah, this is the first time in all of our conversation that you referred to that first labor with things "going wrong" in it. You just said we processed the things that went "wrong." We talked about the things that went "wrong" and I'm curious, what were those things? 'Cause you haven't mentioned up till now, you haven't categorized as any particular moment where you thought it went "wrong." It's an interesting phrasing.

0:47:17.6 Sarah H: Huh. Because I don't think anything went wrong, but I experienced it as something going wrong. It was the suddenly blasting into full on, full on labor, like full on transitional labor from nothing. It's like getting on that, I think they got rid of that ride at Cedar Point, the one that, I can't remember the name of it, but you just, you go from nothing and then you shh, like suddenly you're going 80 miles an hour up this big thing.

0:47:42.3 S1: Oh. That's awful. I've never been to Cedar Point.

0:47:44.7 Sarah H: Oh, it was just, there was no preparation. So that to me was something went wrong. It's...

0:47:51.3 S1: So as you processed with this midwife then the things that could have been done differently, where did you guys focus? Were they, were they things that like your care providers could have done differently?

0:48:03.5 Sarah H: It wasn't so much that things could have been done differently. It was understanding what happened [S1 affirmative], 'cause I don't think anything, I think it was approached like nothing could have been done. But it's just the way she always, okay, this woman, her name was Sandy, she always emphasized to me your body, the understanding your body knows what it's doing and it has its own way of doing things. And, 'cause we processed Emma's birth too. And so your body likes to have precipitous labor. It's just the way you are, your body likes to gain 60 pounds with each pregnancy. Like, I gained 60 pounds with Jacob.

0:48:42.1 Sarah H: I didn't do a thing and it all, within a year it was all gone. It was just gone, like, and so as I was getting upset about gaining all that with Emma, she said, it's, "You did it with Jacob, you're doing it again. It's just your personal body, the way it does things." So, she normalized that kind of stuff. Um, so I think she, I think she helped me, what I interpret as going wrong is just explaining what was happening. Like, like, the Pitocin, why they had to turn it off because I was already, I just barreled into full labor. So, so it would've been, it made it worse to have it on and how once I got going my body was just going fast and that's just the way I go. Um, and so there's no time in there to get used to the contractions. There's no time between the contractions. There's no time to slowly expand and stretch. There's, it's just, off to the races.

0:49:44.0 Sarah H: And had I had a third child, we were going to book it beforehand, induce me and give me an epidural like right away and then know that I'd probably would just barrel through it, but not be in such pain. The third time would've been like really anticipating.

0:50:00.7 S1: Yeah. I mean, at this rate, the third one would've come out in seven minutes. So...

[laughter]

0:50:05.5 Sarah H: Anywhere. That's why she said we'd have to get you before as soon as the baby was healthy and we knew everything was okay, we couldn't wait for, 'cause she said you could just give, you know, at home on your bathroom floor at that point.

[laughter]

0:50:18.7 S1: Of course, by that point you might have been an expert at it.

[laughter]

0:50:21.6 Sarah H: Yep.

0:50:23.0 S1: On your own.

0:50:23.3 Sarah H: Birth my baby.

[laughter]

0:50:25.5 Sarah H: I screamed like a banshee the second time too, but it was just a much shorter time period.

[laughter]

0:50:30.4 S1: Just for a shorter time.

0:50:32.2 Sarah H: When she finally got in the room.

0:50:33.6 S1: I thought you were gonna say like, but I was like, it was productive. It wasn't just like panicking, but you were like, no, it was all the same, but just for less time.

[laughter]

0:50:42.3 Sarah H: Less time. She finally made it into the, into the hospital suite and she suddenly, she's at my bedside and she grabbed my face like this and she was telling me to breathe and I breathed in through my nose and then I just screamed in her face, you know,

[laughter]

0:50:54.6 Sarah H: It's just like.

[laughter]

0:50:57.4 S1: You're like, "I can do the breathing, but not in place of the screaming. I can do both."

[laughter]

0:51:03.4 Sarah H: It was, the screaming was absolutely involuntary.

0:51:05.4 S1: I believe it.

0:51:06.1 Sarah H: Yeah.

0:51:06.3 S1: I believe it. All right. So my final question is maybe irrelevant in light of some things we've talked about, but I can imagine for some people having this birth experience, I mean, I don't know any other way to put it, that it might lead to some jealousy when you hear other people's experiences that aren't so... um, demanding, let's say. And I wonder how you came out of it. I can also imagine some people might sort of take it as a point of pride, like, "You guys labored, but I just like delivered, I skipped the labor part."

0:51:39.1 Sarah H: Yeah.

0:51:39.4 S1: And I just wonder how you've conceptualized it in terms of your sense of self and your, I guess I'm just curious if any of that...

0:51:43.0 Sarah H: That was my dissertation question.

[laughter]

0:51:49.0 Sarah H: What I came up with was, my ultimate question was how does a subjectively traumatic childbirth impact the mother's sense of self?

0:51:58.0 S1: Yes.

0:52:03.0 Sarah H: And so as a mother...

0:52:05.2 S1: That's exactly my question.

0:52:05.3 Sarah H: Yeah. As a mother and as a woman, how does it have an impact on that? I do feel deficient in comparison to women who, who have earthy longer, um you know, low moans. I wish I could have had that experience and you know, the way I pictured it in my head, it would've been in a pool, like a water pool, I would be you know, just moaning and riding in through the contractions and getting through them and feeling more powerful and in control and a part of the process. I felt like I had no part in the process, it was just my body.

0:52:48.0 Sarah H: It just, it did what it was going to do, but it left me the essence of me behind [S1 affirmative]. And all I could do was concentrate on surviving. So, there was a separate me apart from the body that was laboring, and I wish it could have all been more holistic and cohesive. So I am very, very jealous of women who have, like, even my sister who had such horrendously long labors, the way she talks about them, they were so powerful. And so meaning for her, meaningful for her, so I, yeah, I think it would have, I think I would feel differently about myself in the process. But it hasn't, the one thing that hasn't changed is I'm a fantastic mother. So, I wonder, I always wonder does it impact some people's ability? If I'm not a whole woman, then maybe I can't be a whole mother.

0:53:49.5 Sarah H: I'm a fantastic mother. I was a fantastic breast feeder. Well, my kids were fantastic breast feeders. So, from then on, everything was fantastic. I feel so competent and powerful, but the actual experience... was almost, um, what's the word that I want? Dissociative. [S1 affirmative] It's like my, my personhood and body, there was no connection there. And so I wasn't able to experience this process that I had looked forward to [S1 affirmative], that I'd wanted to be a part of. And there was nothing I could do about it [right]. It's not like I could try to catch up [right] that it just left me in the lurch. And I eventually just like that part of me sort of just shut down.